



AMERICORPS QUARTERLY

News for Montana's AmeriCorps

Financial \$ense for Montana's Youth

by Gene Donney, MT Legal Services Association

As AmeriCorps prepares to welcome all the new members arriving this summer, we say goodbye to the AmeriCorps Tech Corps program, currently winding down to make room for a new financial education program – Montana Making \$ense. Former program director Katie Kleinhesselink is also moving on to the University of Wyoming at Laramie to direct their Center for Volunteer Services. She has left both Tech Corps and MM\$ in the capable hands of Marian Palaia, former Peace Corps Volunteer (Nepal 98-99) and adjunct professor of Nonprofit Administration at UM.

Although Tech Corps and MM\$ have differing primary goals, some of the existing Tech Corps computer labs, built through the efforts of AmeriCorps members, will be used as financial education sites for the new program, helping to ensure the sustainability of the members' hard work. Montana Making \$ense will be administered through U of M's Office for Civic Engagement, and will provide human resources to organizations involved, or desiring to begin their involvement, in financial education for Montana communities. The program is dedicated to growing sound financial knowledge and behaviors in Montana's youth and providing financial education and support to Montanans in need.

Some MM\$ members will promote financial literacy by serving as emissaries of community-based and statewide financial education organizations. Others will design, implement and facilitate preventative financial education programs in Western

Montana high schools utilizing the National Endowment for Financial Education's (NEFE) High School Financial Planning Program (HSFPP). Members will work in or travel to urban, sub-urban and rural locations to provide training opportunities on financial literacy to constituents' financial education providers are not currently able to reach.

MM\$ members will pursue their own professional development as they provide direct community service, and will report to the program office on the outcomes of their service.

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Spicing Life Up: Communities In Action VISTAs held a chili cook-off to benefit the Richland County Domestic Violence Shelter on June 9th. Over 80 people came out to sample six chilis made by local organizations and individuals, helping raise approximately \$2,500 for the shelter, which will be used to purchase new appliances. Prizes were given for 1st through 3rd place and People's Choice. Pictured below are the Sidney Health Center "Spice Chicks," whose chili won 2nd place and People's Choice.

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Summer 2007

Welcome New
AmeriCorps Members!

Get the W.O.R.D. About Children's Literacy On Video

By Jeanne Moon, Director of WORD Literacy Support Corps

Over the years of working with parents, educators, and community members through Family Resource Centers I've noticed nearly everyone refers to the children at the center of conversation as "my kids" or "our kids." The collective caring for children is obvious, and reinforces a basic tenet of WORD programs, a belief that each person is doing the very best they can with the knowledge and resources they have.

This year the Literacy Support Corps has been fortunate to have member Emily Crawford who is trained and skilled in video journalism. With Emily's expertise, we've created a video of teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, and community members sharing their experience in working together to support children and learning. Our intent with the film is to increase dialogue and actions between educators and parents to strengthen partnerships that support learning.

Through the hours and hours of interviews recorded to create this film, some

common themes emerge. The interviews bring to light the importance of how we choose to use our time, especially the time we have to influence the lives of children. Despite all our technological advances, research continually affirms that nothing supersedes personal interaction for effectiveness of communication and learning. If we care about children, education, families, and healthy communities, we must make and take the time to personally engage with each other and our children. As Superior Elementary Principal Chris Martineau shared when we interviewed him, "I really don't believe there's such a thing as quality versus quantity time. I think quantity time turns into quality time."

In the coming year, we will be looking for opportunities to share this film and meaningful conversation with educators, parents, and community members. As Chris also said in his interview, "We need to keep encouraging each other." I couldn't agree more.

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Coming Soon....

"Our Children"

A Catalyst For Conversation

WORD Family Resource Centers' Program has worked with parents and educators in Western Montana since 1993. One goal of the program is to increase communication and interaction between parents and educators in support of their children's education. Recently, parents, teachers, and administrators sat down with Emily Crawford, the Literacy Support Corps/WORD video journalist, to share the ups and downs of their experience raising and teaching children, to create a meaningful basis for dialogue. If you'd like us to share this video with your staff or community group please contact Jeanne Moon at WORD (406) 543-3550 x248, or email jmoon@wordinc.org.

Sharing Time With The Elderly

By Holly Michels of The Montana Standard

Perhaps no work is more meaningful to the elderly and lonely than the charges of Sister Kathryn O'Neill. But she'd never tell you that. The ever-humble Sister O'Neill, 85, recently retired from St. James Healthcare, capping over 21 years at the hospital.

In 1978 she started the grass-roots effort for home health care, and since then has lead the senior companion program. And when she rides down the freight elevator to her basement office for the last time, she'll leave behind a legacy of hard work and shying away from taking credit for it.

"They call down here 'the dungeon,' but I call it 'the boulevard.' I love it," she said recently.

Sharing Time With The Elderly, cont.

"I like plain, down-to-earth things." From her closet-sized office, now bare-walled in preparation from her departure, Sister O'Neill spent the last two decades coordinating companionship for the home-bound elderly, a job she said has paid off in ways money could never equal.

"I can't believe the relationships developed," she said. "I started with three volunteers, then it became 24. Oh, it was exciting." Senior companions provides elderly clients with someone with whom to talk and spend time.

Joanne Cortese, co-director of the food bank and board member at the hospital, said Sister O'Neill's work has greatly benefited the community. "I was just so impressed with her work and long history of both beginning the program and seeing it through all these years," she said.

Cortese said the program positively impacts seniors living alone. "I know some folks who have had a senior companion and I know what a difference it makes in their lives; somebody's coming and they can get out and go to the store, just the ordinary stuff we take for granted. She is just a gift to this community." But true to character, Sister O'Neill gives all the credit to the program.

"It's as good a service we have to offer to keep people from dying of loneliness," she said. "It's the first real friends that a lot of people have had in a long time." Volunteers have to be at least 60 years old, Sister O'Neill said, and often stick with their clients for decades.

"They grow older with clients. We kind of forget we're getting older too." Sister O'Neill said that was true for her own mother, Clara. "I went to Livingston to live with her for her last few years. One day I told her 'I'm going to take you to the senior citizens center.' She said she wasn't a senior citizen, and at that time she was 95." Sister O'Neill said the elderly "can teach us so much." "They can inspire us; teach us patience, caring and love in a silent way. When I'm with someone often I think if I could be the kind of person this person is as they're growing older." Over the years, Sister O'Neill has seen many changes in her field.

A 1940 graduate of Park County High School,



Sister Kathryn O'Neill recently retired from volunteering with St. James Healthcare. In 1978, she started their senior companion program which now hosts dozens of volunteers.

Sister O'Neill studied nursing in the Midwest during World War II and witnessed the introduction of penicillin.

In her early stint in Butte she worked on the second floor on the old St. James Hospital in the miners' ward. "It was the most fabulous experience," she said of the near 30-bed facility. "It was full all the time. They loved the nurses." During that time her name was Sister John the Baptist, but that changed quickly after she started visiting patients at home.

"I would come in and they would be all covered up because they thought it was a man coming to see them," she said. "So then I went back to my baptismal name." Sister O'Neill said as nursing advances, patients benefit. "All these changes are very good. Nurses are very well-prepared. After everything, I don't regret anything. This has been a great experience." Now Sister O'Neill is heading to the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth mother house in Kansas. And though she officially left the hospital May 29 with a going-away party, Sister O'Neill said goodbye in her own way first by throwing a party for her basement co-workers. "I work with all the launders and housekeepers and engineers in the dungeon, and I asked if we could have a party for them," she said.

Always thinking of others, Sister O'Neill said she'd like one last chance to pay tribute to the hard-working around her. "I wanted it so we can say goodbye that way."

Email reporter Holly Michels at holly.michels@lee.net

Montana Conservation Corps Life Is More Than Trail Work

By Anneliese Ranzoni, Montana Conservation Corps, Helena

I joined MCC as a corps member in 2006. I had the notion that I would be out on trails and living in desolate regions where people rarely ventured. Five months of wilderness and physical labor seemed the ideal way to do something good. It wasn't long before I found out that MCC is more than just swinging a pulaski.

I'm back in 2007 to create opportunities for others to see just what is possible when we work together toward bettering our environment and community. For those of us lucky enough to experience MCC, the mere exposure to nature instills feelings of compassion and a desire to protect it. At MCC, we work to maintain what we love.

But MCC is more than this. MCC has long-term objectives that can only be realized when the seeds of commitment to the environment are planted in our hometown communities. As Helena's Volunteer Coordinator, my duties range from organizing service events to promoting MCC and linking citizens with organizations that can help them help their fellow residents. Service events are not only an opportunity for MCC to extend its hand to our neighbors but occasions for us to share our aspirations and hopes.

At the core of this new position I believe there is something truly inspirational in its simplicity: the underlying awareness it encourages. Producing informed and caring citizens is one of the Corps' goals. Putting people in direct contact with issues that are affecting the

country is one of the best actions we can take to achieve it. Every time we come together with common purpose we take one more step toward a brighter future. This is why I hope that every chance we get will be viewed as an opportunity to discover an innovative approach to old challenges. And so, I am immensely excited for the coming season, to work with everyone, and to see the culmination of all this potential.



Anneliese Ranzoni was a corps member in Missoula last year and is now MCC's first volunteer coordinator. She is piloting the volunteer program in Helena this summer.

When I first came out to Montana from the East Coast I had little knowledge of what to expect from people in the western states. I had been curious to discover what motivated and what hindered the other half of the country. It is clearly evident that the motivations are the same. When I go any place where there are improvements being made, I discover the same concerned, engaged group of dedicated individuals.

I consider myself lucky because I get to help promote achievable solutions to what might appear to be impassable road blocks. I am proud to be sharing ideals of civic engagement, environmental stewardship, partnerships and basic concern for one's neighbors. I am grateful to be participating in another year with MCC.

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We want to hear about YOUR project! The next AmeriCorps Quarterly will be published in October. Submit your story or pictures to gdonney@mtlsa.org by September 30, 2007 for inclusion in the next AmeriCorps Quarterly, to be published in October. Please include the author's name and email address.